

U.S. Park Service unveils winter plan for snowmobiling

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, Wyo. (AP) — Snowmobilers would run alongside U.S. Highways 89-267 through Grand Teton National Park under the final winter use plan completed by the National Park Service.

The plan for Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks is considered a compromise that would primarily rehabilitate existing facilities and would not significantly harm the environment or increase the number of visitors to the parks.

The plan needs funding from Congress to go forward, according to the 115-page document prepared by the National Park Service.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supports the final plan, agreeing that it would not hurt endangered or threatened animals in the area.

The most controversial section of the plan concerns the Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail, which conservationists abhorred and snowmobilers pushed for.

Conservationists preferred that snowmobilers trailer their noisy machines from Togwotee Pass to Yellowstone. Snowmobilers, on the other hand, wanted a new trail blazed for them through the open terrain of Grand Teton and Rockefeller Parkway.

The final plan fully pleases neither.

Snowmobiles would be allowed to run through Grand Teton and Rockefeller Parkway. But their trail would be groomed alongside U.S. Highways 89-267 between the east boundary and Flagg Ranch, where it would connect with Yellowstone snow roads.

Traffic lanes along this route would continue to be plowed for cars and trucks. In addition, the National Park Service would groom a strip on the east-north side of the traffic lanes to provide a suitable surface for snowmobile travel.

Some trees would have to be cut down, but "no large mature trees will be removed. No earth moving will be required for the snowmobile trail and the tread will not be detect-

able in the summer."

All existing plowed roads and snow roads would be retained. However, the Potholes area would be closed to off-road use.

"Winter use is expected to increase by a moderate amount, then level off over the next five to 10 years as the plan is implemented and the new Continental Divide trail comes into use," according to the plan.

The plan also would rehabilitate staging areas, warming huts, gasoline stations, interpretive facilities and administrative offices. The number of overnight accommodations and food service facilities would not be significantly increased by the plan, but some buildings would be upgraded. The Snow Lodge at Old Faithful would be replaced with a new facility or rehabilitated, the plan said.

In deciding on the final plan, the National Park Service passed over two other options. One would have placed greater emphasis on restoring and maintaining quiet and solitude in the winter throughout the park.

Another option would have been to place greater emphasis on social visitor experiences.

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